

Jealousy by teej_318

Series: Prompts - April 2021 [5]

Category: Stranger Things (TV 2016)

Genre: And starts dating someone else, Angst, Angst and Fluff, Angst with a Happy Ending, Boys In Love, Coming Out, F/F, F/M, Fluff, Gay Will Byers, Kinda oblivious Will Byers, M/M, Mentor Robin Buckley, Mike Wheeler Loves Will Byers, Mike gets mad jealous, Oblivious Mike Wheeler, They're In Love Your Honor, Tooth-Rotting Fluff, Will Byers Loves Mike Wheeler, Will comes out, they're just dumb

Language: English

Characters: Dustin Henderson, Eleven | Jane Hopper, Jim "Chief" Hopper, Jonathan Byers, Joyce Byers, Lucas Sinclair, Maxine "Max" Mayfield, Mike Wheeler, Nancy Wheeler, Robin Buckley, Steve Harrington, Suzie (Stranger Things), Will Byers

Relationships: Dustin Henderson/Suzie, Joyce Byers/Jim "Chief" Hopper, Maxine "Max" Mayfield/Lucas Sinclair, Robin Buckley & Mike Wheeler, Robin Buckley/Original Female Character(s), Will Byers & Mike Wheeler, Will Byers/Mike Wheeler, Will Byers/Original Male Character

Status: Completed

Published: 2021-04-20

Updated: 2021-06-11

Packaged: 2022-03-31 14:38:14

Rating: Teen And Up Audiences

Warnings: No Archive Warnings Apply

Chapters: 9

Words: 19,556

Publisher: archiveofourown.org

Summary:

Will comes out to Mike, who is of course totally supportive of his best friend. But when Will gets a boyfriend, Mike isn't sure how to feel and even questions if he might be homophobic.

1. Chapter 1

Author's Note:

- For [paladinscleric](#).

The members of The Party came stumbling out of Hawkins High School. They had just attended the winter dance put on by the school, which had been themed around glowsticks. They all had glowsticks around their necks and wrists, which they had gotten from student council members when they had arrived at the dance.

Now, they made their way toward the parking lot, each of them traveling in twos, except for Dustin and El, who were joined by Dustin's girlfriend Suzie. The three of them looked like they could have danced all night long without stopping.

"Listen, you guys wanna go to IHOP?" asked Dustin as they neared the cars. "I'm still wide awake and I'm starving after all that dancing!"

"I don't know," Lucas started to answer before Max cut him off.

"Yeah, I'm starving, too!" she exclaimed. "We should totally go!"

"But I'm the one driving," Lucas protested. "What if I choose not to go to IHOP?"

"Then your ass is gonna be dragged to hell and back," El answered, smirking at Max, who grinned back at her.

"Point taken," Lucas said.

"How about you, Mike and Will?" asked Suzie. "You guys are welcome to join us."

Mike looked at Will, who shook his head slightly.

"Maybe another time," Mike said. "I don't think Will and I are really feeling it after all that. You guys have a good time, though."

Dustin and Suzie both tried to convince Mike and Will to join the

others, but Mike and Will politely declined, insisting that they were fine, but just tired. Though it was hard to sell that story to them, considering how little dancing the boys did at the dance, particularly Will. He had only danced during the fast-paced songs, and only a handful of them at that. Mike, however, had danced most of the night, even though he had offered to sit with Will during the slow songs. But Will had insisted Mike dance with El, who was feeling a little left out while the other couples were dancing.

Eventually, the others stopped pestering Mike and Will to go with them and they piled into Dustin and Lucas' cars and drove off toward IHOP. Meanwhile, Mike and Will got into Will's car and Will started up the car, pulling away from the high school before the parking lot was packed with students leaving the dance.

"Sorry if you wanted to go out with them," Will said once they were on the main road. "I just wasn't feeling it tonight."

"No, it's okay, Will. I wasn't really feeling it either, to be honest. And really, I wasn't even really feeling it at the dance."

"What do you mean?" Will asked, frowning.

"I only danced with El cause you told me to," Mike said. "And just to be nice to her, you know? I felt bad about leaving you at the table all by yourself."

Will chuckled slightly to himself.

"That's very sweet of you, Mike," he said.

They drove in silence for a few moments before Mike spoke again.

"Did you have a good time at least, Will?"

"Yeah, I had fun," Will replied in a somewhat distant voice. "It was fun to dance with everyone and the glowsticks definitely made everything look cool. I just hate that I missed out on dancing with someone, one-on-one, you know."

"I'm sorry," Mike said quickly. "I didn't mean to make you feel bad."

"No, no, you definitely didn't," Will said. "God, that's not what I meant at all. Sorry, Mike. It's just..."

But Will didn't finish the thought. Instead, he pulled over the car and brought it to a stop. Mike frowned and glanced over at Will, who wasn't looking Mike in the eyes. He looked like he was struggling with whatever it was he was about to say. Mike stayed silent, knowing that Will needed this moment.

"Mike?"

"Yeah?"

"I'm gay," Will said, finally turning to look at Mike.

Mike gave Will a small smile.

"Oh," Mike said, unsure of what to say with this news.

There was a brief silence before Will spoke again.

"You can't tell anyone, though," Will said. "Nobody really knows and I don't want anyone to find out."

Mike shook his head.

"I won't, I promise," Mike said earnestly.

"Okay," Will said, letting out a huge sigh of relief. There were a few more seconds of silence before Will spoke again. "Are you surprised?" he asked, looking over at Mike.

"No," Mike said.

"So you knew?"

"No," Mike said hurriedly.

"But you're not surprised."

"Do you want me to be surprised?"

"I don't know," Will said.

"Okay. Well, you're still my best friend, Will. Nothing has changed. I still love you."

Will grinned slightly. He knew Mike meant that he loved him platonically, of course. They said it to each other all the time, and The Party always said it to one another, too. But hearing those words meant the world to Will.

"I love you, too, Mike," Will said.

Mike smiled warmly back at Will, who started to blush slightly. He turned away from Mike's gaze and put the car back into Drive. He turned on the turn signal despite the road being empty. It was more out of nervousness than anything else.

"Will, there's nobody coming," Mike said in an amused voice.

"Yeah, I know," Will said as he pulled away from where he had stopped the car. He suddenly burst into laughter, which was contagious as Mike soon found himself laughing as well.

Soon they found themselves in front of the Wheeler household. Will parked the car in the driveway and turned off the car. He was staying the night at the Wheeler house tonight since his Mom had a date with Hopper and Jonathan was working late. Will followed Mike into the house and to the basement, where Mike had set up some makeshift beds for the two of them to sleep on, just like they did all the times when they were little kids. The two of them changed into more comfortable clothing before they headed toward the beds.

Before Will could start to pick up the blankets to make his spot on the floor, Mike pulled Will into a hug. He held onto Will tightly, as if silently telling Will that everything was going to be okay.

"Thank you for trusting me enough to tell me, Will," Mike whispered.

"Thank you for being here, Mike," Will replied as he hugged Mike back, holding onto his best friend like a lifeline. "I'm so lucky to have you in my life."

2. Chapter 2

Summary for the Chapter:

Mike works a shift at the Hawkins video store with Robin and Steve. Will shows up and asks Mike a huge favor and of course Mike is happy to oblige.

A few days later, Mike arrived at the Hawkins video store, where he worked part time as a clerk. Normally he wouldn't work during the week because of his school schedule, but since he had the whole previous weekend off from work due to the dance, he decided to make up some hours and work when there was some availability. The perk of working during the week was that the store wasn't as busy, so Mike could lounge around the store with Robin and Steve, who both worked there as supervisors.

"Hey, hey, hey," Mike said as he walked around the counter to join Robin and Steve, who were both on their computers. It looked like they were printing all of the returns that had come through the store that day. That usually meant that Mike was gonna be put to work. After there was some gossip with his supervisors, of course.

"Hey, Wheeler, how was the dance?" Steve asked. "You get to dance with any hot girls while you were there?"

Robin rolled her eyes while Mike chuckled slightly.

"Boy, you're really interested in my nonexistent love life, aren't you, Steve?" Mike asked, sounding amused.

"Well, did you?" Steve insisted.

"I mean, I did dance with El, but that's just because she was feeling lonely. It didn't mean anything. We're just friends."

"Oh come on, Wheeler, with your dashing good looks and charm, you weren't able to get any other girls to dance with you?" Steve asked. "I was hoping to give you dating advice while you were here tonight."

"Well, I hate to disappoint, Steve, but it looks like I'm gonna remain

single."

"Did you have fun at least?" Robin asked.

"Yeah, it was pretty fun," Mike said. "The glowsticks definitely made everything look cool and the music wasn't too bad for a change."

"I saw Max's pictures on Instagram at IHOP, but you and Will weren't there. What's up with that?"

"Oh, nothing, Will just wasn't really feeling it. To be honest neither was I."

"Why, did something happen to Will at the dance?" Robin asked, frowning slightly.

Mike shook his head.

"I just think he was tired, is all," Mike said. He hesitated before he shook his head slightly to himself, determined to keep Will's secret, no matter how much it would have helped talking to Robin. "Anyway, what do we have on tap for this evening?"

"Just returns for now," Robin said, pulling a paper from her printer and handing it to Mike. "Just need you to go through the list and verify everything that was returned today and then start shelving them. Might have some more work for you later if Steve ever decides to open up the box of some of the new movies we got."

"I'll pretend I didn't hear that," Steve said, clicking away on the computer with a bored expression on his face.

"You could just do it and get it over with, Steve," Robin said, punching Steve on the arm.

"Yeah, but I could also just leave it for Keith to deal with in the morning," Steve replied.

Robin and Mike both rolled their eyes and grinned at each other before Mike took the paper Robin had printed and headed over to the return bin. He grabbed the bin and brought it over to the table where he would compare the returns to the list of expected returns for the

day and match up each account; his job on this was to see if there were any movies not yet returned and then charge the customer account with late fees. It was somewhat boring work, but it helped make the time pass by rather fast during his shift.

As it was the middle of the week, there wasn't as much for Mike to do in terms of returns. Only about two dozen movies and games had been returned, so it wouldn't take him too long to check in everything against the list of the media due back from customers and then to start charging accounts with late fees. Mike quickly lost himself in his work and became unaware of anything happening around him. Robin and Steve both found their own tasks to do to pass the time and Mike was soon lost in his thoughts as he worked.

He was about halfway through checking in the movies and games when the door jingled open. Mike didn't look up, too busy focusing on the task to notice who had come in. A few seconds later, Mike looked up when he heard someone clear their throat. He startled slightly.

"Oh, hey, Will!" Mike said, grinning at his best friend.

"What are you working on?" Will asked.

"Oh just getting the returns checked in and making sure everyone who had something due today has returned it. I get to start checking to see if I get to charge late fees soon."

Will chuckled weakly, which caused Mike to pause. Mike suddenly noticed that there was something off about Will. He almost looked sickly, like he wasn't feeling well at all.

"Will, are you okay?" Mike asked, frowning.

"Um..." Will said.

"Did something happen, Will?" Mike asked. "Was it Troy again?"

"No, no, nothing like that," Will said hurriedly. "Um...it's just that Mom and Jonathan are both gonna be home tonight and I kinda wanted to...you know."

Will glanced over his shoulder, as if expecting someone to overhear the conversation and react badly to it.

"Oh!" Mike exclaimed before he lowered his voice just loud enough for Will to hear him. "Are you saying you want to come out to them tonight?"

Will nodded, still looking tense. He almost looked like he was gonna pass out. Mike had half a mind to make Will sit down and relax. He gave Will another smile to try and get him to calm down.

"Well, I'm sure everything will go well with them," Mike said. "Your Mom has always been super cool and I don't think Jonathan would react badly either."

"I'm so scared to tell them, Mike," Will said.

Suddenly, Mike had a thought.

"Do you want me to come over after my shift is done?" Mike asked. "I'm just here til 8:30 tonight, so I can come over right after."

"I was kinda hoping to ask you that," Will said, blushing slightly.

"Of course, Will!" Mike said. "I'll be there for you. You know I've always got your back."

Will grinned at Mike. He looked like he felt a little better after the chat, but he still looked nervous.

"Um, do you mind if I just kinda hang out here? I'm too nervous to go home by myself."

"Sure, Will," Mike said. "I shouldn't be too much longer with these returns and then I'll get them entered in the computer. Robin or Steve can take over late fees and then you can help me sort these back. We'll find some other way to kill time after that."

For the rest of Mike's shift, Will became his unofficial assistant. He helped Mike put away the movies and games that had been returned that day and later helped Mike set out some new selections that had arrived after Robin bullied Steve into checking in some of the new

inventory. In between tasks, Mike and Will just shot the breeze; Mike wanted Will's mind to be taken off the looming coming out that was going to happen when Mike got off work. Privately Will thanked Mike, relieved to have other things to think about and not dwelling on what was going to happen that night.

Sooner rather than later, it was 8:30, which meant Mike's shift was over. He quickly punched out in the employee lounge and grabbed his jacket before walking out with Will. Will hadn't driven to the store since he didn't live too far from it and the weather wasn't terribly cold out for a winter day.

The two of them walked in relative silence as they now both considered what was about to take place. Will was nervous, Mike could tell, but Mike also knew Joyce and Jonathan; he knew they were going to love and support Will no matter what. But he also knew it might take them some time to adjust to it, which is why Will had asked him to go with him when he came out to them.

They soon reached the Byers house and walked up the steps to the front door. They paused on the porch. Will's breath suddenly hitched.

"Hey, everything is gonna be okay, Will, I promise," Mike said, putting a reassuring hand on Will's shoulder.

Will nodded, unable to form a coherent response.

"Will, I want you to breathe with me real quick, okay? It'll help you calm down a little bit."

Mike breathed in through his nose. Will mimicked him and together they breathed until Will visibly calmed down.

"Thanks Mike," Will said in a shaky tone.

"I'll be right with you the whole time, okay?" Mike said. Will nodded. "You just tell me if you need to take a break or anything and I'll do whatever I can to help."

Will nodded again. He took one more deep breath before he opened the door. The two of them hurried inside the house and shut the door behind them.

"Hey, Will, Mike, how was the video store?" Joyce asked, looking up from watching TV on the sofa.

"Oh, it was fine," Mike replied, knowing Will was probably too nervous to speak. "It wasn't too busy tonight since it's the middle of the week, so not as much foot traffic as I'm used to."

Joyce nodded at Mike and then turned to Will.

"Will, sweetie, are you okay?" she asked, frowning slightly. "You look a little tense."

"I..." Will said in the shaky voice he had spoken with outside. He cleared his throat and took a deep breath, shutting his eyes for a split second before he continued. "There's something I need to talk to you and Jonathan about, and I'd really like it if we can just talk here in the living room."

"Well of course, honey," Joyce said, starting to stand up from the sofa. "Is everything all right?"

"Everything's okay," Mike said quickly. "He just has something important he needs to talk to you about and he just needs everyone to listen and have an open mind."

"We can do that," Joyce said. "I'll go and get Jonathan and we can talk."

Mike nodded as Joyce took off to go and fetch Jonathan. Mike and Will sat down together on the sofa.

"Everything's gonna be fine, Will," Mike said reassuringly. "You okay?"

Will nodded.

"I just wanna get this over with."

"I'm gonna be here the whole time, okay?"

Will nodded again just as Joyce and Jonathan walked back into the room, both of them looking confused by what was going on. They sat

down on the two recliners in the room and looked at Mike and Will expectantly.

"Okay, before we get started, I just want you both to remember to keep an open mind," Mike said. "This is something big that Will needs to say and it's going to require you to have an open mind."

"Okay, we can do that," Joyce said, nodding.

"What's going on?" Jonathan asked. "Why all this buildup?"

Mike turned to look at Will, who looked rather ill.

"Take your time, Will," Mike said.

Will took a few deep breaths to calm himself before he spoke.

"So there's something I need to tell you both about me," Will said after he cleared his throat to speak. "I just want you guys not to think about me any differently after I tell you. Nothing has changed. I'm still me."

Joyce and Jonathan nodded at Will, who sighed deeply once again before he spoke.

"Mom....Jonathan...I'm gay," he said.

"Honey..." Joyce said as if she were searching for the right thing to say.

"Like I said, I'm still me," Will said hurriedly.

"Of course you are, Will," Joyce said.

"Yeah, you're still just the same old Will," Jonathan said with a grin. "Still the same little brother I like to tease and who I depend on for a lot of things."

Will let out a sigh of relief and looked close to tears. He turned to Mike and smiled at him.

"Thank you for being here with me, Mike," Will said.

Mike grinned and gave Will a quick hug.

"How about I go make some tea and give you guys a moment to talk?" Mike offered.

Will nodded furtively at Mike. Mike stood up from the sofa and headed to the kitchen to busy himself with tea making.

Once Mike was out of the room, Will turned to his mother and brother.

"I'm sorry I didn't tell you guys first," Will said. "It was just easier to tell Mike."

"Will, it's okay," Joyce said. "It takes a lot of trust for you to be so open about yourself to other people. It makes sense that you told Mike."

"Yeah it makes perfect sense, Will," said Jonathan. "You and Mike have always been so close. I'm glad you could trust him enough and that he was here for you."

Will nodded and then decided to ask the one question that had been on his mind since he came out.

"Did you guys know?" Will asked in a small voice.

Joyce and Jonathan exchanged a glance that seemed to confirm that they knew.

"We knew that you had some kind of secret," Joyce said.

"It seemed for a while now that you had something you wanted to tell us but that you were keeping to yourself," added Jonathan.

"We wanted to ask you about it, but we didn't wanna push you," said Joyce. "Maybe we made a mistake."

"No, Mom, you didn't," Will said. "I did such a good job of hiding it that I couldn't even admit it to myself."

"Being gay is your thing. There are parts of it you'll have to go

through alone," Joyce said. "I hate that because I can't take away any pain you might feel. When you told us, you said 'I'm still me.' Well, I want you to hear this: You are still you, Will. You're the same son I love and adore and whose drawings always make my day."

At this, Will started to cry, not from sadness but from the almost overwhelming feeling he got from being fully accepted.

"You get to breathe freely now, Will," Joyce said. "You get to be the best possible version of yourself. And you deserve everything you want."

By this point Will was full on nearly sobbing from the joy of being accepted. Joyce and Jonathan both got up from the recliners and walked over to the sofa, where they pulled Will into a hug that sandwiched Will between them.

Within moments, Mike returned to the living room, carrying a tray of tea mugs. He smiled when he saw the Byers family hugging on the sofa. He set down the tray on the coffee table and then sat down in one of the recliners, nursing a mug of tea. When the Byers family finally broke apart from the hug, they all giggled at seeing Mike watching them.

"Sorry, Mike, we kinda got lost in the moment there!" Joyce exclaimed, wiping some tears from her eyes.

"That's okay," Mike said grinning. "I expected you all to have a little moment after all of that. That's why I buggered off to make tea."

The Byers family all chuckled at Mike's joke. Joyce stood up from the sofa and walked over to Mike. She gestured for him to stand up and pulled Mike into a hug.

"Thank you for being here for him," Joyce whispered into Mike's ear. "Will is so incredibly lucky to have you in his life."

Notes for the Chapter:

Hello, all!

Thank you for all the love you all have given to this

story already! It's meant a lot to me and has helped me be inspired to write! I've spent the last couple of nights working on this chapter and it's honestly one of my favorite things I've ever written! I hope you all love it as much as I do!

Stay tuned for more soon!

3. Chapter 3

Summary for the Chapter:

Will, Max and El have a sleepover at Max's house a few weeks after Will came out to everyone. There, Max decides to play matchmaker when Will reveals he has a crush on someone in his painting class.

Within the next few weeks, Will had come out to everyone in The Party. Everyone had taken it well and it had been much easier for Will to tell all of them than it had been to tell his family and Mike. Everyone had been super supportive of Will and all encouraged him to live his best life, no matter what. Robin had even started giving Will dating advice when he told her, which Will appreciated even though he wasn't sure if he even wanted to start dating.

One night, while Mike was working, Dustin had a family thing and Lucas was swamped with an English project, Will, Max and El had a sleepover together at Max's house. Luckily for them, Max's step-brother had long since moved out and now that her less than respectable step-father was also out of the picture, that meant Max's home life was much better than it had been when they were all in middle school. And since Max's mom was able to get a better paying job, Max hadn't had to move from her home when her mom and step dad split.

During the sleepover, the three of them got caught up on all of their assignments for school. As spring break was nearing, they didn't want to leave any work for the break, especially since Will's birthday took place over the break, so they ended up finishing all of their work before they just started hanging out.

By the time Max's mom came home around 10:30, they had finished their homework and were all sitting in the living room, chatting animatedly. The door opened and Max's mom walked into the room, looking tired, but grinning at the three of them.

"Hey, kids, I hope you all are having fun tonight," she said.

"We are, Ms. Mayfield," said Will, smiling at her.

"Thanks for letting us stay over tonight," added El.

"Oh, it's nothing, dear," said Max's mom. "But I do ask that you all try to keep it down tonight and don't stay up too late. I know it's Friday and almost spring break time, but I could use the beauty sleep."

The three kids chuckled.

"We'll make sure to keep it down, Ma," Max said. "And we won't stay up that late. Well, maybe late for you."

"Very funny, young lady," Max's mom said, grinning at her daughter. She then blew Max a kiss. "You all sleep well tonight and I'll see you in the morning for a big breakfast!"

The kids cheered as Max's mom disappeared into her bedroom. Once they were sure the bedroom door was closed, they started talking again.

"So, Will," Max said, grinning at Will with a mischievous expression on her face. "I know you just came out and all, but has anyone caught your eye yet?"

"Max!" El exclaimed, going red in the face.

"What?" Max said, shrugging. "Come on, I can't ask my friend about his dating life?"

"You could try and be a little subtle!" El cried.

To El's relief, Will had been giggling while she and Max had been bickering.

"Wow, you guys seem really interested in my love life," Will said.

"Well," Max said impatiently. "Spill it, Byers. Are you crushing on anyone right now?"

Will hesitated, but Max pounced on it when she saw Will definitely had someone on his mind.

"You are crushing on someone!" Max said triumphantly. "Who is it? Is it someone in the Party? You know, I bet it's Mike!"

Will's face went as red as a tomato.

"God, no, I don't have a crush on Mike!" Will said hurriedly. "I'm not about to ruin my friendship with my best friend over a silly crush."

"Are you saying you've had a crush on Mike before?" Max asked.

"Maybe a long time ago when I was first figuring things out," Will said. "But I moved past it for the sake of our friendship. Besides, Mike is straight. There's no way it could have happened, even if I still felt that way."

"But you're crushing on someone, right?" El asked. "It's kinda obvious from the way you blushed there."

Will sighed.

"All right, maybe I do have a little crush," Will said. "But it's not serious. I don't even know if I should act on it."

"Nonsense!" Max exclaimed. "Now that you're out, you definitely should date someone! Why wait, Will? Besides, prom is coming up soon and you should definitely take someone with you!"

"You think Hawkins High will be okay with a gay couple attending prom together?" Will asked.

"If they have a problem with it, then they'll have to face my wrath," Max said. "And we all know how deadly that can be."

The three of them laughed heartily at that.

"Yeah, that's a good point. I pity the fool who willingly or unwillingly has to endure your wrath, Max," Will said, chuckling.

"So, is there someone you'd be interested in dating and maybe bringing to prom?"

"You guys know Johnny Powers?" Will asked.

"No," said El at the same time Max said, "Yeah, isn't he in your art class?"

Will nodded.

"Yeah, we have painting class together. He's pretty good as an artist. A little quiet, but we've always gotten along well."

"You should ask him out, Will!" Max said.

"Max, I barely know him," Will said. "If I'm gonna be dating someone, I'd at least like to just hang out with them as friends first."

"Well how about this: you text him and we'll meet him at the mall tomorrow and hang out together as a group. If you like him and think you'd be a good couple, then maybe you can ask him out."

"Gee, you're really excited about playing matchmaker aren't you?" asked Will.

"What can I say?" Max said. "It's something that I think is fun. Besides, if he or any other boy breaks your heart, El and I will team up and defeat them."

Will laughed. "I don't doubt that."

"Well, what are you waiting for? You should text Johnny and see if he's free to hang out tomorrow!" Max said.

"What do I tell him?"

"You tell him that you're gonna be at the mall tomorrow with a couple of your friends and wanna know if he wants to tag along," Max explained. "Say you don't wanna be the only guy there since we'll make you go into all of the girly stores and put makeup on you."

"Oh good god," Will said. "Nothing like a little gender stereotyping to get someone to go somewhere with you."

"Well you don't have to be sexist about it," Max said. "Just tell him that he's welcome to come with us and hang out if he wants to get out for a bit."

"All right, all right."

For the next few minutes, Will started texting Johnny. They had worked together on a project for their painting class earlier in the school year, which is how Will had his number in the first place.

"Okay, he says he'll come with us to the mall tomorrow," Will said. "And before you ask, no I didn't tell him I didn't want to be the only guy shopping tomorrow. I just offered for him to tag along if he wanted to."

"Well there you go!" Max exclaimed. "You guys will get to hang out with friends and if you like him, maybe you'll end up walking away with a boyfriend tomorrow!"

"I guess we'll see," said Will.

Near lunchtime the next day, Will, Max and El arrived at the Starcourt Mall. They waited in the food court for Johnny to arrive, ordering some pretzels and cheese to snack on before they went shopping. Soon, Will spotted Johnny and waved him over to the table.

"Hi there, Will," Johnny said nervously. "It was very nice of you to invite me along to go shopping today. Who are your friends?"

"This is Max Mayfield," Will said, gesturing to Max, who was enthusiastically waving at Johnny. El kicked her under the table and Max had to turn away to avoid showing Johnny that she had winced. Will remained oblivious to the girls' actions. "And this is El Hopper."

"Hopper?" Johnny asked while he shook El's hand. "Are you the chief's daughter?"

El nodded.

"Yeah, I'm his adopted daughter."

"It's nice to meet both of you," Johnny said. "So where are we off to today?"

"I think we're gonna go to Hot Topic first," Will replied. "Max wanted to get some Harry Potter merchandise and there are some stuff there I wanted to check out."

"Sounds good," Johnny said.

Once they were done snacking, the four of them stood up and threw away the trash before taking off toward Hot Topic. When they reached the store, El and Max took off toward the Harry Potter merchandise, leaving Will and Johnny alone.

"So, what are you looking to buy here, Will?" Johnny asked.

"Er..." Will said hesitating, remembering that he hadn't yet come out to Johnny yet. "Well, I was hoping they had some Pride merchandise in stock."

"Oh that's cool," Johnny said. "I've found some stuff here before. I even bought a Pride flag for my bedroom a couple of months ago."

So that confirmed that Johnny was indeed gay. Will breathed a sigh of relief that he was correct in his assumption.

Will and Johnny walked over to some of the Pride merchandise that was for sale. Will wasn't sure if he wanted a Pride flag just yet, but he definitely wanted to display his pride for himself, at least in a subtle way. He shuffled through the merchandise and eventually found a Pride bracelet that he could wear and a small pin he could wear on his clothes. When he had picked out his things, he showed them to Johnny.

"Just those two pieces?" Johnny asked.

"Yeah," Will said. "I definitely wanna show my Pride, but I don't wanna be, I don't know, over the top-ish, about it, you know?"

To Will's relief, Johnny nodded.

"Yeah, I'm kinda the same way," Johnny said. "I mean, I went all out at home decorating my room, but when I'm out in public, especially at school, I prefer to be a little more subtle about it. That's why I have these rainbows on my shoes."

Johnny pointed down at his shoes. Will looked down and saw the rainbows that outlined the shoes. It made him smile at Johnny's subtle act of showing who he was. Will looked up at Johnny and saw that Johnny was looking directly in his eyes. Will blinked and out of the corner of his eye, he saw Max and El watching the two of them expectantly.

"Hey Johnny?" Will said in a quiet voice.

"Yeah Will?" Johnny replied.

"Would you..." Will cleared his throat. "Would you wanna go out with me sometime?"

Johnny's face broke out into a huge smile and he started blushing slightly.

"I was kinda hoping you were gonna ask that," Johnny said. "When you asked me to come hang out with some friends, I was hoping we could connect a little more and maybe I'd get the confidence to ask you out finally. I've been trying to for months, but I always get too nervous."

Will giggled.

"Well, I'm down if you are," he said.

"I'd love to go out on a date with you, Will."

Will smiled warmly at Johnny, ignoring Max's smug look.

Will hurried into the Hawkins Video Store, glancing around for a sign of Mike. When he couldn't find his best friend, Will hurried over to the desk, where Robin was finishing with a customer.

"Hey there, Will," Robin said warmly as she looked up at Will. "What's up?"

"Is Mike here?" Will asked. "I was hoping to see him for a minute."

"Yeah, he's in the back on his lunch break," Robin said. "You can go ahead and go back there and see him. If anyone asks, tell them I said it was okay."

"Thanks, Robin," Will said, hurrying over to the employee lounge. He had bugged Mike on his lunch break more than once, so Will knew his way to the lounge. He knocked on the door before he walked into the lounge.

Mike glanced up from the book he was reading, grinning at Will.

"Hey Will, what's up?" Mike asked, putting his bookmark into the book.

"I've got some big news, Mike," Will said excitedly.

"Ooh, what is it?" Mike asked.

"I, uh...I got a boyfriend!"

Mike's eyes widened in shock.

"Will, that's wonderful!" Mike exclaimed, standing up and pulling Will into a hug. "I'm so happy for you! So, who's the lucky guy?"

"You know Johnny Powers, right?" Will asked.

Mike nodded.

"Yeah, he's that kid you worked with in painting class, right?" Mike said. Will nodded. "I didn't know you two were all that close or anything."

"Well, we kinda went on a 'friend date' with Max and El, at Max's suggestion," Will said.

"Ah, so Max played matchmaker," Mike said with a grin. "I guess I better watch out, cause next thing you know she's gonna try and get me to go out with someone. But enough about that, I'm so happy for you, Will!"

"Thanks Mike," Will said, blushing slightly in spite of himself. Mike

always knew just the right thing to say.

"So, when do I get to meet him?"

"Well, I was thinking next week at my birthday party," Will said. "Everyone will be there and it will be a good chance for you and everyone else to get to know him."

"That sounds good, Will," Mike said, returning to his seat. "I'm looking forward to meeting him."

"He's a good guy. I can't wait for you to meet him!"

Mike grinned at Will.

"Anyway, I just had to tell you right away, Mike! I'll see you later, yeah?"

"Sure thing, Will. See you later."

Will waved at Mike before he turned and left the lounge. Mike sighed to himself and reached for his book again. He opened it and tried to start reading, but found himself unable to. Mike huffed and closed the book again and rested his head on the table, suddenly feeling like he had a headache that he couldn't explain.

A few minutes later, Steve came walking into the room, carrying a bag of food for his own lunch.

"What's eating at you, Wheeler?" Steve asked when he sat down at the table.

"Will just told me he has a boyfriend," Mike said.

"What's wrong with that?"

"Nothing," Mike said hurriedly. "I just don't know what to think yet since I don't even know the guy. I guess I'm just surprised is all."

"Nothing wrong with that," Steve said, shrugging slightly. "You're his best friend, after all. It makes sense that you'd want to look after him now that he's dating someone. That's pretty much the best friend's

job."

Mike nodded, though he wasn't all convinced that was it.

Notes for the Chapter:

Hello, all!

Hope you enjoyed this update! It came much faster than I anticipated. I'm having so much fun writing this story that this chapter just came out of me in just two days! I won't promise such a quick update for the next chapter, but I already know what happens next and I plan on writing it over the next few days.

Stay tuned for more soon!

4. Chapter 4

Summary for the Chapter:

Mike shows up to Will's birthday party and meets Will's boyfriend Johnny.

On Will's birthday, Mike had to work a mid-evening shift. He had gotten to the store just after school around 3:30 and would be working until 7:30. He had tried to get the day off, but Keith had insisted that Mike work, even though Robin had told Keith she could handle working a shift solo so Mike could be with his friends.

As Mike and Robin both predicted, Mike being at the store wasn't all that necessary. They weren't that busy for a Friday night and Robin could easily have managed the shift on her own. But they decided not to test Keith's patience with them and begrudgingly worked the shift together. When it was nearing time for Mike to leave, he started getting antsy.

"So what did you get Will for his birthday?" Robin asked as they sat around at the counter.

"I got him a new sketchbook since he's been without one for a few weeks now," Mike replied. "Well, I mean, the one he's using now was getting full; he's still sketching in it, but I figure he could use a new one. And I got him this comic book art set for us to work on some comics together."

"That sounds great, Mike," Robin said, grinning at Mike. "Will's lucky to have a friend like you. I hope that new boyfriend of his is at least half the young man you are."

Mike blushed slightly.

"I wouldn't know," Mike said, trying to cover up his reaction to Robin's compliment. "I've never actually met him. Will definitely seems to like him, though. He sounds like he's nice enough."

Mike hesitated, unsure if he wanted to share his worries with Robin.

But of course Robin seemed able to see right through him.

"What's on your mind, Mike?" she asked.

"What if I don't like him? Johnny? It's not like Will has ever dated anyone before, and I'm just worried that I might not like him and I don't ever wanna put Will in a position where he has to choose between one of us."

"I don't think you have to worry about that, Mike," Robin said. "I mean, did Will ever feel like he had to choose between you and El?"

"That's different," said Mike. "El and I were already friends to begin with and she and Will were already close when she and I started going out. But Johnny is a total stranger to me. I'm just worried that if I don't like him, I'm gonna make things difficult for Will. And I don't wanna do that, of course."

"Well, if you end up not liking Johnny, it's not like you have to be friends with him or anything," Robin said. "You could just be two of the most important people in Will's life who don't interact with each other."

"Yeah I guess so. I just don't wanna be the one who makes things awkward."

"Well then I guess you'd better try extra hard to like him then, Mike."

Mike chuckled slightly.

"All right, thanks for the pep talk. Look, my shift is over in 5 anyway. You mind if I go ahead and bounce?"

"Sure thing, Mike. See you later. Have fun at Will's!"

When Mike arrived at the Byers house, he received an enthusiastic greeting from all of his friends and Will's family.

"Hello all, sorry to keep everyone waiting," Mike said. "I got here as fast as I could."

"Oh nonsense, Mike," Joyce said. "We're just glad you could make it."

"But I, for one, am dying for some of this delicious cake!" Dustin said, licking his lips.

"Yeah, you haven't shut up about it ever since you laid eyes on it," said Lucas, sounding annoyed.

Dustin and Lucas started bickering while everyone else greeted Mike. When Mike finally reached Will, he pulled his best friend into a tight hug.

"Happy Birthday, Will," Mike whispered directly into Will's ear.

"Thanks, Mike," Will replied, grinning at Mike. He gestured to the young man sitting next to him. "And this is Johnny."

Mike turned and saw Johnny for the first time. He was exactly as Mike had imagined: rather good looking and definitely a good fit for Will. Mike extended his hand.

"Johnny, it's nice to meet you," Mike said, shaking Johnny's hand.

"You too, Mike," Johnny replied, grinning at Mike. "I've heard a lot about you. It's great to finally meet you."

"Okay!" Joyce exclaimed, clapping her hands together. "Now that we're all here, I think it's time for some birthday cake!"

Everyone in the house cheered and took their spots around the table. Joyce, meanwhile, was transporting the birthday cake to the dining table, doing her best to balance it and keep it steady. Jonathan was filming on his video camera.

Just when Joyce placed the cake down, she started singing the birthday song. Soon everyone else joined in and started singing the song. Will was blushing heavily when they were finished. He closed his eyes for a moment as if making a wish before he blew out the candles on the cake. Everyone else cheered as Joyce leaned in and started cutting up the cake and giving out slices.

Mike, meanwhile, turned to El and Max, who were sitting next to

him.

"Has he opened gifts yet?" Mike asked.

El shook her head.

"No, he wanted to wait for you," El replied.

"We just kinda sat around chatting waiting on you to turn up," added Max.

"Gee, way to make me feel guilty about having to work, Max," Mike said with a grin.

Max shrugged.

"What can I say? It's a gift."

Just then, Joyce handed Mike a slice of cake, which Mike took and set down in front of him. He wasn't all that hungry; he never was after work. But he decided to at least take a few bites, at least to make Will happy and to make sure Joyce knew he wasn't gonna eat much because of her cooking.

When they were all done eating cake, they gathered in the living room for Will to open his gifts from everyone. Mike held onto his bag, where he had hidden the two gifts. He was hoping that Will would open both of his gifts back-to-back and maybe after he had opened everyone else's gifts. That was the tradition on Will's birthday, after all.

To Mike's surprise, Will decided to open Johnny's gift first. Will tore into the package and pulled out a comic book art set. Mike froze when he realized that it was the same set he had gotten for Will.

Suddenly Mike was overtaken with a headache. He lost all train of thought and couldn't focus on anything that was happening around him. It felt like a thousand thoughts were soaring through his mind all at once.

Mike managed to shake himself out of his stupor when he felt someone tapping on his shoulder. He blinked and turned to look at

Lucas, who was frowning at him.

"You okay, Mike?" Lucas asked. "You look a little sick."

"I'm fine," Mike said quickly. "Just a little headache."

"You sure?" Lucas asked.

Mike nodded.

Lucas nodded back at Mike and returned his attention to Will, who was opening some more of his gifts.

Mike, meanwhile, felt like a fool. He should have known that Johnny would have given Will some sort of art gift. And he should've known Will would have probably told Johnny about his love of comics. Mike sighed to himself, realizing that he wasn't going to be able to gift Will one of his gifts, at least not without looking like he was trying to outdo Johnny.

Soon, Will turned to Mike, grinning expectantly at him. Seeing Will's smile seemed to help with Mike's headache a little bit. The pain faded as he reached into his bag and pulled out the package with the sketchbook in it and handed it over to Will, who excitedly opened it right away.

"Ooh, a new sketchbook! Thanks, Mike!" Will exclaimed, looking over the sketchbook.

"Yeah, it really looks great!" added Johnny, who turned to grin at Mike. He frowned when he saw Mike's face. "Mike, are you okay?"

Mike hated Johnny in that moment. It wasn't Johnny's fault that Mike had a headache, but to call it out in front of everyone like that annoyed Mike to no end. Everyone turned to look at Mike expectantly.

"I'm fine," Mike said. "I just have a little headache is all."

"You wanna go lay down for a bit, Mike?" Joyce asked in a kind voice. "It might help make you feel better."

Mike nodded, desperate to get away and have everyone's attention off him.

"Uh, do you have anything Tylenol or anything like that?" Mike asked.

"Of course, honey. Take whatever you need and then go and lay down in Jonathan's room. If you're feeling better in a bit, you can watch a movie with all of us later."

"Thanks," Mike said, hurrying out of the living room as fast as he could. He hated being the center of attention when it was for something so trivial. He ran to the bathroom and shut the door behind him, shutting out the sounds of laughter coming from the living room.

Mike looked at himself in the mirror. He looked exhausted, though he couldn't explain why. It's not like he had lost sleep recently or anything, but Mike looked more tired than he had seen himself in a while. Maybe that's why Johnny had been so loud in pointing out how Mike looked.

Mike shook his head, which didn't do his headache any favors. He reached into the medicine cabinet and found some Tylenol. He swallowed a pill dry and then splashed some water on his face. Mike then left the bathroom and dashed over to Jonathan's room. He crashed down onto the bed, closing his eyes and trying to will away his headache.

When Mike next opened his eyes, he realized hours must have passed. He felt groggy and it took him a moment to remember where he was. He glanced at the window; night had fallen. Mike stood up from Jonathan's bed and tiptoed out of the room. When he reached the living room, he found it empty of everyone but the Byers family.

"Hey Mike, are you feeling any better?" Joyce asked when she noticed Mike was in the room with them.

"Yeah, the headache definitely seems like it's gone," Mike replied. "So Jonathan you can have your bed."

"Oh good," said Jonathan. "I was worried I'd have to toss you out of it."

Mike chuckled at the joke before he went over to help Will picking up some of the trash that was around the living room.

"Sorry, Will," Mike said. "I didn't mean to not be here for most of your party."

"It's okay, Mike," Will said, giving Mike a smile. "It's not your fault you had a headache."

"Yeah, but I should've tried harder to take the day off from work. Maybe if I hadn't worked right after school and come here I wouldn't have been such a buzzkill."

"Hey," Will said, putting an arm on Mike's shoulder, which shut Mike up quickly. He also felt warm. "It's okay, Mike, I promise. There's nothing for you to be sorry about. You were here and that's all that matters."

Mike smiled at Will.

"Thanks, Will. You're the best, you know that?"

"Yep," Will said, nodding and grinning.

"I hope you like the sketchbook," Mike said as he and Will started cleaning up trash again.

"Oh I love it, Mike," Will said. "It'll be perfect to go with that comic book art set Johnny got for me."

Hearing mention of Johnny and the art set seemed to reawaken Mike's headache. It wasn't as strong as before, so Mike was able to mostly ignore it.

"I'm glad you like it."

"So I gotta know, Mike: What do you think of Johnny?" Will asked, looking at Mike. "I mean, I know you guys didn't talk much, but from what you saw: what do you think?"

Mike hesitated. Will was looking at him earnestly. In all honesty, Mike still didn't quite know what to think of Johnny and he hoped that Johnny happening to get Will the same gift as Mike was just coincidence.

"I think as long as you're happy, that's all that matters," Mike said diplomatically.

Will gave Mike a warm smile.

"Thanks, Mike. I am happy."

Mike gave Will a smile that quickly faded when Will turned his back on Mike again.

Notes for the Chapter:

And the angst begins!

This is where the fun part comes in for me as a writer on this story! Mike is all up in his feelings regarding Johnny, but he's trying so hard for Will's sake. Unfortunately for him, it's gonna get worse before it gets better. In fact, I was planning out one of the later moments of this story and I put myself into Mike's mind during that moment and I was literally in tears imagining how Mike was feeling at that moment. I'm so excited to write that scene and share it with you!

Thank you for all the love you've given this story already! More coming soon!

5. Chapter 5

Summary for the Chapter:

Despite doing his best to get to know Johnny and try and get along with him, Mike can't seem to like the guy. He keeps trying and trying to like his best friend's boyfriend, but to no avail. He turns to Robin for advice and he may not like what she has to say.

It continued for several weeks after that. Every time The Party got together and Johnny was there with them, Mike found himself hating the other boy. It frustrated him because he had no reason to not like Johnny. Johnny didn't have any bad habits Mike could be annoyed with and Johnny was nothing but respectful and even friendly to Mike. Mike had tried his best to hide his emotions, but he always felt like it was obvious he was straining not to say more any time that he spoke to Johnny. To Mike's relief, though, nobody had said anything to him about it, so perhaps he wasn't being as obvious as he thought.

Still, the idea of not liking Johnny for seemingly no reason bothered Mike. He went online one night, doing some Google searches to try and find answers to his feelings toward Johnny. He Googled "My best friend is in a relationship and I don't like their partner, what do I do?"

Most of the answers Mike found online were useless. It seemed to be rather common for people not to like their friends' significant others, but there always seemed to be a reason why. For the life of him, Mike couldn't figure out why he didn't like Johnny.

Eventually another thought crossed Mike's mind and it was one he would hate himself for if it was true. He was familiar with the term homophobic and he knew how terrible it was. But it seemed to be the only explanation for his behavior regarding Johnny; maybe, on some level, Mike was homophobic.

He Googled the term "homophobia" and he was directed to a quiz put out by PBS about the subject, where he could answer questions to determine if he was homophobic. Mike took the quiz, which

determined Mike was not homophobic at all, but instead was likely an ally of gay people. But that still didn't explain his attitude about Johnny.

After doing some more soul searching to try and explain his feelings, Mike decided he would turn to one of the other gay people he knew. Robin had been in a relationship with her girlfriend Bianca since before Mike worked at the video store. He had met Bianca a handful of times and found her a funny person who was easy to get along with. Mike would even go so far to consider Bianca a friend. And he definitely considered Robin a friend, so he thought maybe she would be able to help him navigate what he was feeling.

Mike didn't really have an idea of how to broach the subject with Robin. He decided simply outright asking might be his only course of action. He waited until he was working a shift where it was just him and Robin, which happened a few weeks before prom.

"So, are you excited for your prom in a few weeks?" Robin asked while she and Mike were sitting around, waiting for customers to arrive or for closing time to begin.

Mike grimaced when he thought of prom.

"Not really," he said.

Robin frowned.

"Why not? I thought going to prom was the end-all, be-all of high school. Unless something has changed in the few years since I was in high school."

"Well, that might be true for other folks, but for me, it's not," Mike said. "I mean the only reason I'm going is to appease my mother and my friends who kept going on about how prom 'wouldn't be the same' if I wasn't there." Mike scoffed. "As if."

"Why do you say that, Mike?" Robin asked.

"Well aside from basically being the only single one of the group, not counting El because she always ends up finding someone to dance with, the whole idea of prom just doesn't appeal to me. I don't even

think if I was dating anyone I would feel any different. The whole dressing up and going to dinner before the big dance thing just sounds kinda meh to me. Like it might be for other people, but it's not something I'm dying to do or anything, you know?"

Robin nodded.

"Yeah I get that. Still, don't you at least wanna experience going to prom with your friends at least?"

"Not really," Mike said, shaking his head. "They're all gonna be too busy spending time with their dates. I'm just gonna be off to the side awkwardly sipping punch all night. And that's not to mention how awkward it's gonna be at the hotel afterward."

"Why?"

"Even if El doesn't find someone to bring as a date, it would be awkward as hell for the two of us to be the only single ones there, given our history. Plus I feel like the whole hotel room experience should just be for couples. I should be allowed to go home after prom, but my friends insisted I go with them. I feel like I'm their pity friend they're just tagging along for the sake of not making me feel lonely or anything. But the thing is I don't even really wanna go. I'm just going so they won't ask a thousand questions about why I'm not going."

"Well maybe you can bail early and just go home," Robin said.

"Maybe," Mike said thoughtfully. "I'd just have to explain to my Mom why I wasn't at the hotel with everyone else."

Mike's thoughts drifted as he considered asking the question that was on his mind. It seemed to show on his face because Robin picked up on it.

"Is there something else?" Robin asked. "You look like you've got something on your mind."

Mike sighed, part of him unsure if he even wanted to know the answer to the question.

"Robin, do you think I'm homophobic?" he asked, shutting his eyes for a moment.

When Mike opened his eyes and looked up at Robin again, she was looking at him with a confused expression on her face.

"Well, first off: No, I don't think you're homophobic," Robin said. "I've never heard you make a homophobic remark, plus I kinda have a radar about that kind of thing. It's like a gaydar but in reverse."

Mike chuckled at Robin's joke, though his heart wasn't in it.

"Second of all, why would you ask that question? Do you think you're homophobic, Mike?"

"That's the thing, I don't know," Mike said. "I've never had a problem with gay people. I've probably even known people who are gay without knowing they're gay. But ever since Will started dating Johnny, I just don't know."

"Oh boy," Robin muttered under her breath, but not loud enough for Mike to hear it.

"I've tried so hard to like Johnny, but I just can't bring myself to it," Mike said. "It's like his whole existence annoys me and he doesn't do anything to annoy me. I've been trying so hard to get to know Johnny for Will's sake but no matter what I do, it's like he exists to annoy me. I don't know what's wrong with me and I just want to fix it."

Robin stared at Mike for a few moments before she sighed deeply to herself. She knew Mike wasn't likely going to like what he heard, but he definitely needed to hear what she had to say.

"Well, first thing, Mike, I'm gonna let you know that you're not homophobic," she said. "But there's something else I'm gonna tell you and I don't think you're gonna like what I tell you."

"I doubt it'll make me angrier with myself than I already am, but go ahead and tell me," Mike said.

Robin sighed again.

"Mike, you feel that way about Johnny because you're in love with Will."

It looked as if Mike had short-circuited. He froze in place as the weight of Robin's words fell onto him. He remained silent as he digested what Robin said to him. It was several moments before he responded.

"No," Mike said, shaking his head. "No. I can't be in love with Will. I can't."

"Mike, there's nothing wrong with it..."

"No. I can't be in love with him. I made myself a promise that I would not be the one to stand in the way of Will's happiness. That's why I can't be in love with him."

"Mike, it's okay," Robin said. "Just because you're in love with Will doesn't mean you have to act on it."

"STOP!" Mike shouted. He froze as he remembered where he was. He glanced around the store, but was relieved to see there weren't any customers in the store. Still when he spoke again, he spoke in a lower tone. "I'm not going to let myself ruin anything for Will. Maybe it's best I don't go to prom at all. And maybe I need to distance myself from Will."

Robin sighed as Mike started pacing around, muttering to himself as he came up with other possibilities of what he needed to do.

"Mike, you can't do this to yourself. You're not a bad person for falling in love."

"Sure I am!" Mike said, stopping his pacing and staring right at Robin. "How can I call Will my best friend when I'm being selfish!"

"You're not being selfish, Mike! In fact you're going out of your way to avoid hurting Will because you care about him so much."

"But I still fell in love," Mike said. His face did a little twitch and he hit himself on the side of the head, as if punishing himself for his feelings. "Goddamn it, I should've known something was wrong with

me. I'm a terrible person and an even worse friend. How can I even look Will in the eye now that I know the truth?"

Mike resumed pacing. Robin huffed slightly before she leaned forward toward Mike and gently placed her hands on his shoulders. Mike paused his pacing looking directly at Robin with a confused expression on his face. Robin removed her hands from Mike's shoulders and looked directly into his eyes.

"Listen to me, Mike: You are not a bad person," Robin said. "These things sometimes just happen. It's nobody's fault. It just happens. Sometimes it's out of anyone's hands and you just have to accept it."

"Now I know you're worried about Will, but you've told me that you've tried many times, for his sake, to like Johnny. That tells me that you care deeply about him and only want what's best for him. You deserve to have him in your life, no matter what happens. Whether that's as friends or something more, you two are meant to be in each other's lives."

At this, Mike's lips started to tremble. He looked close to his breaking point. Robin leaned forward and pulled Mike into her embrace as Mike started to sob uncontrollably. Robin gently held onto Mike as he let it all out.

"It's okay, Mike," Robin whispered. "You're gonna be okay."

Notes for the Chapter:

Hawkins Friday Nights, y'all!

Ever since I first decided to write this fic, this has been the chapter I've been most excited to write! I knew from the beginning that Robin was going to be the one to set Mike straight and realize he's not homophobic, just madly in love with Will.

But now Mike will have to live with this truth and it won't be easy. And let's just say prom is not going to be Mike's favorite thing.

More coming soon!

6. Chapter 6

Summary for the Chapter:

Things come to a head at prom when Mike and Johnny have a moment alone together. Mike runs away from prom and finds himself in a familiar place.

In the weeks leading up to prom, Mike was dreading the event more and more. He wanted to skip prom altogether, but he knew he wouldn't be able to do it without arousing the suspicion of his friends and family. He knew how disappointed his mother would be if he didn't attend prom and he knew that Will would spend all of prom worrying about Mike if Mike didn't attend. So for the sake of his mother and Will, Mike eventually relented and made the decision he would go to prom.

While his friends went all out with everything related to prom--they even rented a limo to take them to prom and to the hotel room after prom--Mike did the bare minimum. He rented a generic tux that wasn't anything special. He also didn't bother with a boutonniere since he had nobody he was trying to match looks with. Although Karen had tried to convince Mike to buy a boutonniere, Mike had flatly refused, telling his mother he wasn't going to spend any more money on prom.

On the evening of prom, Mike was the last one to be picked up by the limo. While he waited for the limo to arrive, Karen had insisted on taking numerous photos of Mike. She had even included Nancy and Holly in the photo shoot.

"Mom, I don't know why you're bothering with all of these pictures," Mike complained as Karen kept taking pictures.

"Mike, you'll regret it if you don't have all these pictures to look back on when you get older," Karen said.

"I doubt that," Mike whispered to himself.

"Come on, Mike, lighten up, will you?" Nancy said.

Mike huffed and put on his best fake smile. It was exhausting putting on this mask, showing that everything was normal when everything was far from normal.

To Mike's relief, the limo arrived a few minutes later. Although he was hoping to just jump into the limo and take off, all of his friends got out of the limo, all of them insisting they take some group photos now that everyone was together. And of course Karen was only too ready to do so.

"Lord have mercy," Mike muttered as he joined his friends in front of the limo for the photos.

Karen mercifully only took a handful of photos of the group before she let them get back into the limo. Once they had all piled inside, Max turned around and told the driver he could drive them to the restaurant for dinner.

Mike looked around at all of his friends. He could definitely admire all of their outfits; everyone had dressed to kill. El looked like Belle from *Beauty and The Beast* with her enormous yellow dress and had her hair done similarly to Belle. Lucas had on a white tux that went well with the red colored dress Max had picked out; Max's dress was a perfect compliment to her fiery hair. Dustin and Suzie had opted for wearing blue as their complimentary color, which looked great on both of them.

Will and Johnny, meanwhile, had also color coordinated. They both wore a shade of green on their tie and vest, and Mike had to prevent himself from looking at Will too much. Will definitely looked good and Mike couldn't help feel yet another pang of jealousy that he hated himself for.

"You guys all look great," Mike said, tearing his eyes away from Will and Johnny.

Everyone murmured words of thanks, with some comments thrown in at Mike's outfit. Mike ignored most of them, but he definitely heard Will's above the others'.

"You look great, too, Mike," Will said. "That outfit works really well for you."

Mike had to go out of his way to avoid blushing.

Dinner had been a mostly routine affair. They all ate foods that wouldn't get their clothing dirty and ate rather slowly on top of it. Sooner than Mike would have liked, they arrived at prom. A photographer took some group photos of everyone before taking photos of all the couples. Mike and El stood off to the side rather awkwardly during the photos and had to politely decline taking a couple's photo when the photographer asked them if they would like a photo.

Once they were inside the gym, everyone except for Mike immediately headed for the dance floor. Instead of dancing, Mike decided to go find a table where they could sit in between songs and where he planned to spend most of the evening. Already prom was annoying him and he had been there barely five minutes. He started to feel the familiar headache whenever he saw Will and Johnny dancing together, so Mike forced himself to watch other people when they danced.

Prom had been in full swing for about an hour and a half when Will and Johnny joined Mike at the table. The rest of The Party had come and gone a handful of times as a group, but Will and Johnny had remained on the dance floor. When Mike saw them coming, he groaned to himself, wishing that one of his other friends would join them.

"Hey Mike," Will said, sounding out of breath as he sat down on the table and started drinking some punch Mike had left out for everyone.

"You guys having fun?" Mike asked, smiling despite the roaring headache he had.

"Yeah, it's been real fun so far!" Johnny exclaimed. "You should come out and dance with the rest of us!"

"Maybe," Mike said, taking a swig of punch to prevent him from saying something he would regret.

"You really should, Mike," Will said. "You don't have to sit here all night by yourself, you know."

Mike shrugged.

"Well, I'm gonna go get some water to splash on my face to cool down," Will said. "You guys want anything?" he asked as he stood up.

Both Mike and Johnny shook their heads. Mike was praying that his other friends would come over and join him and Johnny so they weren't alone. But luck was not in his favor.

"Listen, Mike, I'm actually glad we have a moment alone," Johnny said. "I wanted to talk with you about something."

Mike panicked slightly. Had Johnny figured him out? He glanced over at Johnny, who was looking at Mike thoughtfully.

"What's up?" Mike asked, trying his best to keep his tone neutral.

"I just want to say thank you for being such a supportive friend of me and Will," Johnny said, giving Mike a warm smile. "You've gone out of your way to be nice to me and let me into your friend group. I just wanted to say thank you for that."

At that, Mike's headache reached his peak. It was difficult for him to muster a smile in response to Johnny.

"No problem," Mike said, fighting his way through the pain.

Just then, Will returned and grabbed Johnny's hand, picking him up and pulling him back to the dance floor.

Mike was relieved they were gone. But his head was practically pounding now. No matter what Mike did to try and get rid of it, he couldn't. Mike was starting to feel dizzy and he wasn't even standing up. He realized that he needed to get out of there and put some distance between him and Will and Johnny.

Mike stood up just when Lucas, Max, Dustin and Suzie were walking up to the table.

"Oh, hey, Mike, you finally gonna come on the dance floor?" Lucas asked, grinning at Mike.

"About time, Wheeler," Max added with a grin.

"No, I'm not," Mike said.

"Mike, are you okay?" Dustin asked, frowning.

"Yeah, you look pale," said Suzie. "What's going on?"

"I need to leave," Mike said. The pounding in his head was continuing to grow. He needed to get the fuck out of there. "I'm not feeling very well. Headache."

"Do you want us to call someone?" Lucas offered.

Mike shook his head, which didn't do him any favors.

"I just need to be alone for a little while," Mike said. "I need to clear my head. You guys keep having fun here and have fun at the hotel later. I'll see you guys later."

Without giving his friends a chance to react, Mike turned and ran off. He ran as fast as he could and when he was finally outside again, he took a deep breath of air. The fresh air did wonders for him. He stood outside in the parking lot for a few moments, with his eyes closed, and just breathed in the air. He felt his headache going away slightly, but he wanted nothing more than to get as far from the school as he could.

So Mike took off. He had no idea where he was going and quickly lost himself in his thoughts. He thought of so many memories he shared with Will. The first day they met on the swing sets in kindergarten. Winning the science fair along with Dustin and Lucas in the fourth grade. Comforting Will after his father walked out on the whole Byers family. Supporting Will when Will came out to him and later when Will told Mike about Johnny and then introduced them.

Tears fell down Mike's face as he ran and he remembered and he realized. He realized that Robin had been right. He was in love with Will. It was simultaneously the best and the worst thing he had ever experienced. It made perfect sense; he and Will had been a part of each other's lives for so long now and Mike always wanted to make sure that Will was happy. But seeing Will with someone else did something to Mike. He was jealous, he knew, but he was angry with himself for daring to be jealous when Will didn't even know how he felt.

When Mike finally stopped running, he looked up. He wasn't surprised to see the front door of the Byers house in front of him. He had no idea where he had been running while he did it, too caught up in his thoughts. But it made sense; the Byers home had always felt like a second home to him. It made sense he would come here when he was in crisis.

Mike hesitated before he knocked on the door gently. It was barely loud enough for him to hear, so he was surprised when someone actually answered the door.

"Mike!" Joyce exclaimed when she opened the door and saw Mike. Her eyes widened when she saw Mike's face streaked with tears and his eyes red. "What's going on? Are you okay?"

Mike shook his head and dissolved into fresh tears. Joyce leaned forward and pulled Mike into a hug. Mike clung to Joyce as if she were a lifeline and he let out so many tears. Finally, when Mike had calmed down a little bit, he glanced behind Joyce and saw Hopper sitting on the sofa, looking up at Mike and Joyce with concern in his eyes.

"Oh, I'm sorry," Mike said, his voice shaky. "I didn't know you had company. I'll just go..."

"Mike, I'm not letting you leave when you're in this state," Joyce said. "Just come in, honey, come in."

Joyce helped Mike into the house. Mike couldn't look Hopper in the eyes; he was too ashamed of himself for having broken down already. Joyce helped Mike into the recliner.

"I'll go make you some tea, Mike," Joyce said, hurrying off to the kitchen.

"Are you okay, son?" Hopper asked in the gentlest voice he could.

Mike shook his head, still unable to face the Chief. They had never exactly been close, even when Mike and El dated for a hot minute way back when. But he appreciated that Hopper cared.

Soon, Joyce reappeared in the living room, setting down a cup of tea for Mike on the coffee table next to the recliner. Joyce also sat down on the coffee table so that she could be next to Mike.

"Talk to me, Mike," she said. "What's going on?"

Mike sniffled.

"I've done something terrible," he whispered.

"What is it?" Joyce asked.

"I...." Mike said, hesitating slightly. He took a deep breath. "I fell in love with Will."

"Oh Mike," Joyce whispered as Mike fell into a new crying fit.

Mike cried harder than he ever had in years. Every emotion he had been feeling lately came falling out all at once: His love for Will; his annoyance with himself for catching feelings; his dislike of Johnny that had only to do with his jealousy; his guilt over his feelings even though Will didn't know. It all came out now.

Joyce held Mike as he sobbed into her shoulder. She whispered words of comfort into Mike's ear in an effort to calm him down. It took a while, but Mike had soon exhausted himself from all the emotions he had let out. When he was finally calm, Joyce released Mike from the hug and let him have some sips of tea.

"I'll let you two talk," Hopper said, standing up from the sofa and heading toward the hallway leading to the bedrooms.

Joyce turned back to Mike.

"I want you to know, Mike, that your secret is safe with me," Joyce said. "It's not my place to talk to anyone about it."

Mike nodded at her, waiting for a "but" to come.

"And I want you to know that you being in love with Will is not a terrible thing," Joyce said. "And you are not a bad person because of the way you feel. It's just another part of you who are, Mike. And if there's one thing that I know, living your true self is the best way to live."

"But what about Will?" Mike asked in a small voice.

Joyce smiled at Mike warmly.

"I'm willing to bet that Will feels the exact same as you do, Mike," she said. "I've seen the way he looks at you, like you hung all the stars in the sky just for him. He loves you deeply, Mike."

"I don't want anybody to get hurt," Mike said. "I don't want Will or Johnny to get hurt. I would feel terrible if that happened."

"I think they'll both be okay," Joyce said. "Especially if you let things happen in their own time and not try to rush anything. But I can promise you this, Mike: You're going to be okay."

"How do you know?"

"Because I know that Will loves you too," Joyce said. "And I think he knows it, too. He might not know how you feel about him, but I can promise you he knows how he feels about you. You've just got to give it some time, Mike."

Mike nodded.

"I feel bad leaving prom like that," Mike said. "And I'm sorry for crashing your date."

Joyce chuckled.

"Eh, the date wasn't all that exciting anyway," she said. "Now, how about you get some sleep. You've had quite a night tonight. I think

you should get some rest."

Mike nodded as he started to yawn. Joyce stood up and went to fetch Mike some pillows and a blanket from the closet. She made up the sofa while Mike changed out of his tux and into the sleep clothes he always left at Will's. He curled up on the sofa once he was changed.

"Thank you for everything, Joyce," Mike said as he yawned again and closed his eyes.

Joyce bent down and gave Mike a kiss on the forehead.

"Goodnight, Mike."

Notes for the Chapter:

Hello, all!

Hope you all enjoyed this latest update! I was moved to tears when I imagined how Mike was feeling during this chapter, so I've been excited to write it and share it with you all!

Yesterday I had a chance to meet and chat with Noah Schnapp on Fanmio, which helped inspire me to write this chapter. As such, this chapter is dedicated to Noah.

Also, I have a song that goes with this chapter. It's called [The Game is Over](#) by Evanescence. I think this song perfectly sums up Mike's feelings when he goes to the Byers house.

7. Chapter 7

Summary for the Chapter:

After Mike leaves Prom, the rest of the group heads to the hotel. None of them are able to get ahold of Mike, prompting Will to worry about what's going on with his best friend.

Dustin and Lucas both tried to call after Mike, but Mike quickly disappeared into the crowd, making their efforts useless.

"What was that all about?" Lucas asked, glancing over at the other's.

"No idea," said Dustin. "He's been acting kinda weird lately, have you noticed?"

Max nodded.

"Yeah, it's been going on for a couple of weeks now. He hasn't said anything to you guys, has he?" she asked.

Dustin and Lucas shook their heads.

"He looked real sick," said Suzie. "Maybe there's something serious going on with him and he hasn't told us about it yet."

"No, Mike wouldn't do that," said Dustin hurriedly.

"Besides, he's been home every night like normal, so it's like he's been going off to the doctor's office or anything," said Lucas.

"What are you guys talking about?" El asked as she, Will and Johnny approached the group and sat down.

"Mike ran off," Lucas said. "He said he wasn't feeling well and that we should just stay here while he left."

Will frowned at this news.

"Is he okay?" Will asked.

"We don't know," said Dustin. "He just said he was feeling sick and to have a good time. I guess he's not joining us at the hotel, either, cause he said to have fun there, too."

Will pulled out his phone and quickly sent a check-up text to Mike.

"I'm sure he's fine, Will," Johnny said. "It's like they said, maybe he just wasn't feeling well, yeah?"

Will nodded.

"Yeah, I guess. It's just weird that he would leave without saying goodbye to all of us."

About an hour later, the remaining Party members were riding in the limo as it pulled into the parking lot of the hotel where they would be spending the rest of the evening. As the limo was slowing down, Will checked his phone again.

"Still nothing from Mike," he announced. "This is weird. You guys get anything?"

The rest of his friends all shook their heads. Will huffed in frustration but decided to drop it for now as the limo came to a stop.

The group exited the limo and Dustin whipped out some cash his Mom had saved and handed it over to the driver as a tip. They then headed into the hotel and up to the adjoining rooms that had been booked for the evening. All of their things were already in the rooms; Lucas and Max had checked in to the hotel and dropped off overnight bags for everyone in the rooms before they went back to Lucas' to finish getting ready for prom.

Once upstairs, the group split off into the two rooms to change out of their prom clothes. Dustin, Suzie, Lucas and Max shared a room while El was rooming with Johnny and Will. Privately, El was a little relieved that Mike had left; she couldn't imagine having to share a bed with Mike, even though they were still friends long after they had broken up.

Within about ten minutes, El, Will and Johnny were changed into

more comfortable clothing. Will again checked his phone. Still nothing from Mike, but he didn't say anything about it.

"I'm feeling kinda starved, how about you guys?" Will asked.

"Yeah, I could definitely use something to eat," Johnny said.

"That dinner was good but there was definitely not enough food," added El.

"Cool, let's go bug the others and we'll see about ordering something."

Will led Johnny and El into the adjoining room, where they others had all changed out of their prom clothes. Dustin was sitting along on his bed, but they heard the shower running, which explained Suzie's absence. Lucas and Max were sitting on the other bed and Lucas had his laptop out.

"Please tell me you're ordering food," El said.

"Of course we are!" Max replied. "You think that rabbit food we had at dinner is enough for sustenance?"

Everyone laughed as they piled around Lucas, all calling out what kind of pizza, sides and desserts they wanted to eat. Lucas soon had ordered the food, which was scheduled to be delivered within 45 minutes to their hotel room.

In the interim, the group started playing a game of Monopoly. They didn't team up during the game, instead opting to be as competitive as possible and playing against one another. Will, however, had opted out of playing the game so he could keep an eye on his phone in case Mike texted him back. He was starting to get worried that he hadn't heard from Mike yet; it wasn't like Mike to ignore texts from Will.

When Lucas' phone pinged that the delivery driver had arrived with their order, Will volunteered to go and meet him down in the lobby. He insisted to the others that he didn't need any help and that he didn't mind going by himself.

Once outside the hotel room, Will unlocked his phone again and

decided to give Mike a call.

"Hey, it's Mike, I'm either working or avoiding your call, so good luck."

Will couldn't help but grin slightly at Mike's voicemail. It always made him laugh whenever he called Mike and Mike didn't answer. But this time it wasn't enough to make him feel much better.

"Mike, it's Will," he said. "We're at the hotel room now. I'm just calling to check in on you. I just wanna make sure you're okay. Please call or me or text me, okay? I'll talk to you later."

Will hung up the phone and headed down to the lobby to fetch the pizza. Luckily for him, the delivery driver stacked everything, so it was easier to carry the order back up to the hotel room. When he entered the hotel room again, Will nearly had to kick away his friends, who were all ravenous and ready to dive in and enjoy the pizza, breadsticks and wings.

Once they had full plates, Will and Johnny went out to the veranda that was connected to the hotel room. Since it was a nice evening out, the two decided to eat under the stars. Will had blushed slightly when Johnny suggested it, finding the gesture romantic. They sat down and ate their pizza in a comfortable silence for several minutes. When they were done, they tossed the plates into the trash and stared up at the night sky.

"God, it's beautiful out," Will said, sighing contently.

"Yeah it is," said Johnny.

"I had a lot of fun tonight with you, Johnny," Will said. "I didn't know you had all those dance moves!"

Johnny chuckled.

"What can I say? I'm one of a kind." Johnny said. He hesitated before he spoke again. "I guess I just wish Mike had had a good time too."

Will frowned before he sat up to look over at Johnny.

"What do you mean?" Will asked.

"Come on, Will, you had to have seen it. Mike looked absolutely miserable the whole evening. It was like he didn't even want to be there."

"If that was true, why did he come?" Will asked, although he privately thought he knew the answer.

As if he had been reading Will's mind, Johnny said, "Because he didn't wanna worry you."

Will's eyes widened. He had heard Mike complain about attending prom and it seemed to Will like Mike had been joking when Mike said the only reason he was going to prom was to appease his mother. He had laughed it off at the time, but maybe there was some truth to it.

"Why would Mike think I would worry about him? I would've understood if he didn't want to come."

"But it wouldn't have been the same, right?" Johnny asked.

Will was baffled at Johnny's ability to read him like that.

"I guess you're right."

Johnny sighed before he spoke again.

"You've been using me, Will," he said.

Will blinked.

"What? What are you saying?"

"You didn't mean to, Will, at least I don't think you did," Johnny said. "But you're in love with Mike."

Will had no idea how to respond to that.

"Don't deny it or I probably will get mad," Johnny said. "But it's plain as day to anyone with eyes that you love Mike. And I'm pretty sure

he feels the same way about you."

"What makes you say that?"

"I'm not blind, Will," Johnny said. "I see the way Mike looks at you. And the way he's been with me, I can tell he's jealous that you and me are dating. Mike tries to hide it and he does a really good job of it, but I can tell. He's not mean about it, which I appreciate."

Will still had no idea what to say. He knew in the past that he had some feelings for Mike, but he thought he had grown past them. Apparently he hadn't. And apparently he hadn't done a good job of hiding those feelings. But Mike liking him too? That was a whole other can of worms.

Will sighed as he digested all of this.

"I'm sorry, Johnny," Will said.

"No!" Johnny exclaimed. "I didn't mean to make you feel like you had to apologize, god no! Everything is okay, Will."

"But if you know how Mike and I feel about each other..."

"Then I can cheer you guys on as your friend," Johnny said. "Look, Will, you guys have been nothing but nice to me. It's been great getting to know you and everyone else the past few months. Even with you and me no longer being together, I still want to be in your friend group. And I still wanna be friends with you, Will. And with Mike if he's willing."

Instead of saying anything, Will stood up and walked over to Johnny's chair. He sat down on it and pulled Johnny into a hug. Johnny was slightly taken aback by Will's gesture, but quickly melted into the hug. When they broke the huge, Will smiled at Johnny.

"You're a good man, Johnny Powers," Will said.

"You ain't so bad yourself," Johnny said.

The two of them started laughing. They laughed so hard that Will nearly missed hearing his phone ringing.

"Will, your phone, your phone!" Johnny said in between laughs. "It's probably Mike!"

Will whipped out his phone. He was disappointed to see not Mike's number, but his mother's.

"Hi Mom," Will said, calming down from the laughter.

"Hi sweetie, are you guys having a good time at the hotel?" Joyce asked.

"Yeah, we're all good," Will said. "We just had some pizza since dinner wasn't very filling. I think we're gonna play Monopoly for a bit and then go to bed."

"That's nice, honey, just don't stay up too late," Joyce said. "But anyway I wanted to call and let you know that Mike is here."

"He is?" Will asked frowning.

"Yeah, he showed up here a little while ago. He said he wasn't feeling well and asked if he could stay over. He's sleeping on the couch right now. I heard his phone ringing a little bit ago and I saw a missed call from you, so I thought I'd call and let you know that Mike is safe."

"Thanks for letting me know, Mom," Will said. "Did he seem okay? Mike?"

Joyce hesitated on the other line. Will knew that whatever she was about to say, she wasn't going to be one hundred percent truthful with him.

"He just seemed tired, Will," Joyce said. "He asked if he could stay the night cause he didn't want to walk all the way home."

"Okay, well let me know if anything changes," Will said.

"I will, honey, and don't stay up too late!"

"Yeah, yeah, Mom, I'll see you in the morning. Good night!"

"Night, Will," Joyce said.

Will ended the call, still frowning slightly.

"What's up?" Johnny asked.

"Mike's at my house," Will said. "He's staying over on the couch tonight. Mom said he didn't look sick, but..."

"But what?" asked Johnny.

"There was something she wasn't telling me," Will said. "I'm not sure what, but I could tell she was holding something back. Maybe Mike is really sick or something."

"I think you'd know if he was," Johnny said. "Mike tells you everything, doesn't he?"

"Yeah that's true," Will said, nodding. "Still, I can't help feeling like she was keeping something from me. Like some sort of secret."

"Well, how about you take your mind off it for tonight and we go back in and play some Monopoly with the others? You can help me kick everyone's asses!"

Will laughed and followed Johnny back into the hotel room, grateful for the way things ended romantically between them and wondering what was going to come next.

Notes for the Chapter:

Hello, all!

Apologies that the wait between the last chapter and this one was a little longer. After my Galveston trip, I ended up going to Dallas for Mother's Day without any days off in between trips and working, so it's been kinda "Go, Go, Go!" the past few days. Now that I've caught my breath, I decided to write a new chapter and I hope you like it!

This story has been one of my favorites to write! Although I must admit I'm getting antsy about not yet writing Mike and Will together yet. I can for sure

say now that they both know how they feel, it will happen soon in this story! Stay tuned for more soon!

8. Chapter 8

Summary for the Chapter:

The day after prom, Mike goes home and gets ready for a shift at work. Meanwhile, Will returns home with Johnny to talk to his mother about what he's learned about himself.

Mike seemed to wake up with the sun. As soon as sunlight started to creep into the living room of the Byers home, Mike woke up, squinting in the semi-darkness as he tried to remember where he was. Once Mike got his bearings again, he sat up, remembering why he was feeling so mellow. He yawned slightly before he stood up, folding the blanket Joyce had grabbed for him the night before and setting it on the edge of the couch.

Mike then walked over to Will's room and crept inside. He went over to Will's desk and grabbed some paper and a pen and scribbled down a note. Mike carried the note out of Will's room and set it down on the coffee table next to the sofa before he grabbed his things and headed out of the house.

The journey back to his own home was quiet and uneventful. After pouring his heart out to Joyce the night before, Mike just didn't want to think about things for a little bit and instead let his mind wander. He was also relieved that he had a shift at the movie store later on that would distract him by keeping his mind occupied on his work.

When he reached his home, Mike paused on the porch to take a deep breath and calm himself. He wasn't about to spend the morning talking about prom or his lack of involvement in it. He was hoping just to head upstairs and immediately start getting ready for work.

Luck was apparently on Mike's side. When he opened the door, he found the house was silent; nobody else seemed to be awake yet. Mike breathed a sigh of relief and headed upstairs to the bathroom. He showered, brushed his teeth and got changed into some clothing for work and soon found himself downstairs again.

Mike was just thinking how lucky he was nobody else had woken up yet when he saw Nancy in the kitchen making coffee. He groaned slightly to himself.

"Morning, Slugger!" Nancy exclaimed cheerfully when she saw Mike. "I'm just making some coffee, you want some?"

"Sure," Mike said, his throat feeling dry.

Nancy busied herself with the coffee while Mike sat down at the kitchen table. He found it odd that Nancy was the only one awake, but decided not to question it, at least yet.

Mike thanked Nancy when she set down the coffee mug in front of Mike. He took a few sips of it and let the caffeine wake him up a little.

"So, I couldn't help but notice that you weren't in very many pictures on Max's Instagram," Nancy said.

Mike sighed.

"Do we really have to do this, Nancy?"

"I'm not trying to fight, Mike, honest," Nancy said. "I'm just curious about why you're not in any of her pictures except for the group ones."

"It's cause I didn't dance at prom," Mike said in a bored tone, taking a bigger sip of coffee. He had a feeling he was going to need it.

"Well, why not? You could've asked somebody to dance with you, Mike. Or you could've just danced with your friends. That's what I did at my junior prom."

"Well I'm not you, Nancy," Mike said, trying not to let his anger consume him. "I didn't even want to go to prom. The only reason I did was so Mom would shut up about it."

"That's not true and you know it, Mike," Nancy said, sounding impatient. "You could've ditched prom after taking a few pictures just to make her think you went, but you still decided to go. Why would

you go to prom if you didn't want to?"

"I went so I wouldn't worry Will!" Mike snapped.

There was an awkward silence after this. Nancy frowned at Mike as she tried to process what he had said.

"What do you mean?" Nancy asked. "Why wouldn't you want to worry Will?"

Mike sighed, knowing there was no way to avoid this conversation. His sister was extremely talented in the art of getting the truth out of him, so he figured he might as well come clean.

"I didn't want Will to freak out about me not being there and spend all night worrying about me," Mike said. "But, I also thought that if I went to prom, maybe that would be the thing that finally makes me get over myself."

"Get over yourself?" Nancy asked, frowning even deeper still. "What do you mean?"

Mike took one more deep breath.

"I hoped that it would...that it would make me get over the way I feel about Will."

Mike looked over at Nancy, who was staring back at him with a blank expression on her face. She looked rather confused.

"I'm in love with Will, Nancy," Mike said. "And I thought maybe if I saw that Will was truly happy with Johnny, I could get over him."

"Oh Mike," Nancy said in a soft voice as she pushed her coffee mug out of the way and reached over to grab Mike's hand.

"But it didn't!" Mike exclaimed, now on the verge of tears. "It just made me feel worse. And I had to get the hell out of there, Nancy! I left and stayed at Will's house and I told his Mom."

Mike dissolved into tears as Nancy scooted closer to Mike and pulled him into a hug. Mike sobbed onto Nancy's shoulder for several

moments while Nancy held him and whispered words of comfort into his ear. It took several minutes for Mike to calm down and when he finally did, Mike wiped the tears from his eyes and took another sip of coffee.

"Gee, I thought I was done crying last night," Mike said with a weak chuckle.

"So, what are you going to do, Mike?" Nancy asked. "Are you going to tell Will?"

"I don't think I should," Mike said, shaking his head. "He's with Johnny and I have to respect that. I'm not going to be the reason he and Johnny break up."

"But what if Will and Johnny do break up, what will you do then?"

Mike was taken aback by the question. He hadn't even considered this possibility.

"I don't know, Nance. I just don't know."

"Thanks for coming over with me," Will said, turning to Johnny before he walked back into his house.

"No prob, Will!" Johnny replied, grinning at Will with the smile that Will loved to see. It wasn't as nice as Mike's but it ranked right up there. "I know you're probably nervous to tell your Mom, but I know she likes Mike and she'll know that there's no bad blood between any of us. I think everything will all be okay."

Will grinned at Johnny and took a deep breath before he put his key into the lock and opened the door. The two walked inside and Will shut the door behind them before turning toward the rest of the house.

"Hello?" Will called out. "Anyone home?"

"Be right there, Will!" Joyce called from her bedroom. "I can't wait to hear all about prom!"

Will chuckled to himself as he and Johnny sat down on the sofa. He noticed there was a piece of paper written in Mike's handwriting on the coffee table. Unable to help himself, Will picked up the paper and read it.

Mrs. Byers,

Thanks for letting me stay last night. I don't know what I would have done without you.

Please remember what you said, about my secret being safe with you. I don't think Will should know, at least not right now. I'll tell him one day, maybe.

Thanks again for last night. I gotta go home and get ready for work. I'll see you soon.

Mike

Will frowned when he got to the end of the letter. He had about a dozen questions forming in his mind and he wasn't even sure where to begin.

Within moments, Joyce walked in to the living room. Will decided to brush aside his questions, at least for now, so he could tell his mother what he needed to tell her. Joyce sat down on the recliner opposite the sofa and looked at the two boys expectantly.

"You boys have fun last night at prom?"

"Oh yeah, Mrs. Byers we had fun!" Johnny said quickly. He tended to speak faster than normal if he was nervous. Will had to smile to himself. He and Johnny were both nervous about this chat. "We did a lot of dancing and then just hung out and ate lots of food at the hotel and played Monopoly."

"That sounds fun!" Joyce said, giving the boys a smile. "How about you, Will? Did you have fun at prom?"

"Yeah it was fine," Will said distantly, hoping to get the conversation over with.

"Is something wrong, Will? You look a little tense."

Will took a deep breath. Johnny gave his arm a squeeze in reassurance.

"There's something I need to tell you, Mom," Will said in a quiet voice. "And I want you to keep an open mind like you did when I came out."

"Of course, Will," Joyce said, nodding and looking concerned. "Just tell me, sweetie."

Will looked at Johnny, who nodded at him in reassurance. Will took another deep breath.

"Johnny and I broke up last night, Mom."

"Oh!" Joyce exclaimed. If there was anything she was expecting to here, it certainly wasn't that. "Okay. Um, I guess I'm just a little confused about why you're both here if you broke up."

"We're still friends," Will said while Johnny nodded. "We wanted to stay friends even after we broke up."

"Okay that makes sense," Joyce said. "But that still doesn't explain why you look so tense, honey, or why you asked me to keep an open mind."

"I'm getting to that," Will said quickly, trying to keep any annoyance he was feeling out of his voice. He knew his mother meant well, it was just frustrating that it was taking so long for the truth to come out. Will took a breath. "Okay. So the thing is, the reason Johnny and I broke up is that I'm in love with someone else. I didn't even realize it and then Johnny helped me."

Joyce remained silent. Her face didn't reveal anything, but Will was confident that she probably had an idea of what he was about to say.

"I'm in love with Mike," Will said.

Will looked away from his mother, unable to face her immediately now that the truth was out. He waited a few seconds to calm himself down before he looked up at her again. He was relieved to see she was smiling.

"Took you long enough, Will," she said with an air of amusement in her voice.

"What does that mean?"

"It means that she's like me and she has eyes," Johnny said in an amused voice that matched Joyce's. He started to laugh. "I guess that means I win our little bet about your Mom knowing!"

"Oh shut up!" Will said with no bite to his tone. He turned to his mother. "So you aren't surprised?"

Joyce shook her head.

"No, it's been pretty obvious to me ever since you came out that you have feelings for Mike. I think I've suspected for a long time, but didn't say anything. I thought you could figure it all out on your own."

"Well I definitely did that," Will said. He hesitated as the thought of the note came back into his mind. He looked up at Joyce again. "I saw Mike's note."

"What note?" Joyce asked, looking confused.

Will could tell she wasn't lying.

"This one," Will said, handing the note over to his mother. She took it and read over it quickly before she set it down again.

"What did he mean about his secret?" Will asked. "Is Mike sick or something?"

"No, no, honey it's nothing like that," Joyce said, not quite meeting Will's eyes.

"If he's not sick, then why can't I know what's going on? He won't

return my calls or texts and I'm really freaking out here."

"Will, honey, listen," Joyce said, sounding impossible patient. "I can promise you that Mike is okay. You just have to give him time to find the right thing to say. He'll tell you, Will, I can promise you that."

"How can you be sure?" Will asked.

"Trust me, honey, I know he'll tell you when he feels the time is right. And I think you'll like what he has to say."

Mike waited until he was on his lunch break before he decided to do anything about contacting Will. He knew his best friend was probably worried about him and it made Mike feel terrible. Once he was in the break room, Mike quickly pulled out his phone and dialed Will's number. To his disappointment, Will didn't answer the phone, but Mike was relieved that Will wasn't outright ignoring him, since the phone had rang enough times to be sent to the voicemail. Mike took a deep breath before the beep.

"Hey, Will, it's Mike," he said. "Uh, I'm at my lunch break at the video store right now. I just wanted to say sorry for not responding to your calls or texts last night. I just needed to get out of my head for a little bit. I'll explain it to you when I see you again. I promise, Will. I just...I hope you're not mad at me. Call me if you can in the next little bit or text me. Please, Will. I'll speak to you soon."

Mike hung up the phone. He still wasn't sure if or when he was going to tell Will about his feelings. All he knew was it felt good not to be holding it all in alone anymore. He just hoped he and Will could talk soon.

Notes for the Chapter:

Hello, all! It's been a busy week for me and today was the first day where I was at work and had some time to work on this story and thus a new chapter is here!

I can for sure promise you that endgame is taking

place in the next chapter. Y'all have waited long enough for it and to be frank, so have I. It's getting difficult not writing Mike and Will just getting together, so that will happen in the next chapter, though I won't say how ;) Stay tuned for more soon!

9. Chapter 9

Summary for the Chapter:

A week after prom, Will decides to spend the night at Mike's and come clean about what happened at the hotel after prom.

Mike took a deep breath to try and calm himself and clear his mind before he walked into work. It had been a week since prom. Things had been awkward with The Party at school. Although most of The Party had accepted Mike's half-hearted excuse of being sick, he could tell that Will didn't buy it. He knew he would eventually have to come clean to Will, but he didn't know how to approach the conversation. Part of him just wanted to come right out with it, but another part of Mike couldn't help but be scared. He wondered if this was how Will felt before he came out to Mike.

Will had only come out to Mike a few months ago, but he had gotten a boyfriend so quickly afterward that it was a wonder Mike had gone this long without realizing his feelings. He sighed to himself again before he walked into the store. This was the first shift he'd be working with Robin since prom; she had been off from work the day after prom. Mike was dreading this shift, in part because he knew Robin was going to try and interrogate him about how prom went. He wasn't looking forward to it, at all.

Mike walked into the employee lounge and grabbed his timesheet, punching in before he set down his jacket in its usual spot and he walked back out to the store showroom. As he expected and dreaded, Robin was waiting for him with an expectant look on her face.

"Please don't ask me how prom was," Mike asked, before Robin had a chance to open her mouth.

"Why not?" Robin asked, frowning slightly.

"I just don't want to talk about it," Mike said, trying to keep his irritation out of his tone. "I didn't really have a good time and no I don't wanna talk about why. Can we just leave it at that, please?"

"Okay," Robin said, holding up her hands in mock surrender. "We don't have to talk about prom at all, Mike. I'm sorry that you had a bad time, though."

Mike mustered up a grin.

"It's not your fault, Robin," he said. "Besides, everyone else had a good time. I'm just glad they were able to enjoy it. So, what have we got today?"

Since it was a Saturday morning, Mike would spend the first part of his shift finishing the returns from the night before. Several customers tended to return their movies on Friday nights, which meant it usually took someone on Friday night and someone on Saturday morning to process all the returns and start charging accounts late fees. Mike was relieved for the busy work; it kept his mind occupied on work for a change and he didn't have to think about what he knew he had to tell Will.

Fate, however, seemed to have different plans for Mike. Just as he was finishing processing all the returns in the computer, the phone to the video store started ringing. Mike glanced up and saw that everyone else was busy with customers or starting to take the returns back to the shelves, so Mike picked up the phone instead.

"Hawkins Video Store," Mike said in a bored tone.

"Hey Mike," said a familiar voice.

"Will!" Mike exclaimed a little too loudly. He lowered his voice when he realized how loud he had been. "Hey, Will, how are you?"

"I'm good, Mike," Will said.

Mike frowned slightly. Will sounded nervous to him. But why would Will sound nervous? And why was he calling the store?

"What's up?" Mike asked.

"I, uh, I know that you usually keep you phone in your jacket pocket while you work, so I thought I'd give the store a call," Will explained, still sounding nervous. "I wanted to know if I could come over

tonight and hang out with you."

Mike was taken aback.

"Uh, yeah, Will, of course," Mike said. "What's the occasion?" he asked jokingly.

Will chuckled. He still sounded nervous when he answered Mike.

"You and I haven't gotten to hang out together, just us, in a while," Will said. "I've missed hanging out with you."

"I've missed that too," Mike said. And he meant every word of it. Despite dreading seeing Will and confessing what he was feeling, he did miss his best friend.

"Well, does tonight work?" Will asked.

"Yeah, sure, Will," Mike said. "Mom, Dad, Nancy and Holly all have plans tonight, so it'll probably be just us. I get off at 4, so you can come over any time after that, okay?"

"Sounds good, Mike," Will said.

"Great! Well, I'll see you later on, Will. Can't wait!"

"Yeah. See ya, Mike."

"See ya," Mike said before he hung up the phone.

Mike felt his spirits lift. He was glad that Will had reached out to him and wanted to hang out. It meant he wouldn't have to call Will to set something up and try to work around Will and Johnny going on a date. Mike picked up the returns that hadn't been shelved yet and he headed over to the shelves and started putting back movies, humming slightly to himself.

When he reached the comedy section, Mike stopped when he saw a familiar face browsing for movies.

"Oh, hi there, Johnny," Mike said, hoping that his usual headache wasn't going to return.

"Hi Mike!" Johnny said brightly, giving Mike a smile. "I wasn't sure if you were working today."

"Yeah, I'm here most of the day today," Mike said, approaching a nearby shelf and putting one of the comedy movies he was carrying on it. "Anything I can help you find?"

"Oh no, I'm just browsing for now," Johnny said.

"You got a hot date with Will planned for tomorrow or something?" Mike asked, trying to be friendly and somehow finding it easier for a change. He couldn't explain it.

The smile vanished from Johnny's face. He suddenly looked a little nervous.

"Oh, have you not heard?" Johnny asked.

"Heard what?"

"I figured Will would have told you by now."

"Told me what?" Mike asked, frowning.

"We broke up last weekend," Johnny said.

It felt as though Mike was short circuiting again. He felt just as he did when Robin deduced he was in love with Will and told him. Mike could barely process what he just heard. When he eventually caught up to his thoughts, he spoke in a hushed voice.

"You mean you guys broke up at prom?" Mike asked.

"No, we broke up after at the hotel," Johnny said, looking incredibly uncomfortable.

"What happened?" Mike asked, unsure where this concern was coming from.

"I can't really say," Johnny said. "I know Will was gonna talk to you about it, but I thought he would have done it already."

"Wait, Will wants to talk to me about it?" Johnny nodded. "Why? He could've just told me when it happened. Why wait to tell me?"

"There's a little more to it, Mike," Johnny said, blushing slightly. "I can't really say more because it's not my place, but you should definitely listen to what Will has to say."

What the hell does that mean, Mike thought.

"Well, anyway, I'll let you get back to work, see you around, Mike," Johnny said before stalking off.

Mike remained frozen in place for a few moments as he digested what Johnny had told him. Will and Johnny had broken up. Yet Will hadn't said anything yet. Why not? And why did Will need to talk to Mike about it? He could just say that they broke up and moved on. No, something else had to be going on.

Mike snapped out of his trance when he heard someone clear their throat nearby. He returned some more comedy movies to the shelves before he continued on toward the horror section, his mind racing with new questions.

By the time 4:00 rolled around, Mike was beyond antsy. He had spent the rest of his shift lost in his thoughts as he considered what Will was possibly going to say to him about the breakup and he couldn't for the life of him figure out what was up. When he finally clocked out, Mike barreled out of the video store and ran as fast as he could toward home.

Once inside his house, Mike threw his jacket onto the hangar and headed straight for the basement to get it ready for Will to come over. To Mike's surprise when he reached the bottom of the stairs, Will was already waiting for him on the sofa.

"Hey Mike!" Will said happily. "Your parents let me in before they left so I thought I'd make myself at home."

Mike nodded as he thought of what he wanted to say. Then he decided to just come right out with it.

"Will, why didn't you tell me you and Johnny had broken up after

prom?" Mike asked.

Will looked surprised.

"How did you know about that?" Will asked.

"I saw Johnny today at the video store," Mike replied. "He was looking for a movie so I joked around and asked if you guys were going on a hot date or something tomorrow and he told me you guys had broken up."

"Oh," Will said softly. "Well that's not how I thought this was gonna go."

"How what was going to go?" Mike asked, looking at Will incredulously. "Johnny said that you and I needed to talk about it, but I'm confused about why, cause it's not like I have to know why you guys broke up. Can you please explain, Will? I'm kind of freaking out here."

"Mike, I'm sorry," Will said. "I didn't mean for you to freak out or anything. Believe me, I was gonna tell you everything tonight after we had something to eat, but I guess since the cat's outta the bag..."

Will took a deep breath and closed his eyes, centering himself for a moment before he opened them again and looked at Mike as he never had before. Mike was taken aback by the look Will was giving him and he was having trouble placing it.

"What is it, Will?" he asked. "Is everything okay?"

"I hope they will be," Will said quietly before he sighed again and spoke louder. "The reason Johnny and I broke up is because I'm in love with someone else."

Mike blinked at this news. He had no idea what to say.

"I didn't even know I was in love with someone else until Johnny pointed it out to me," Will said. "He told me that it was obvious to anyone with eyes that I was in love with this person. And then when I told my Mom, she said the same thing. I don't know how I didn't see it myself. I mean, I knew how I felt years ago, but I thought I had

moved past my feelings. But I haven't."

Will sighed again.

"Johnny and I broke up because my heart doesn't belong to him. It belongs to you, Mike."

At that, Mike's mind nearly short-circuited again. His mind started to race as he digested what Will had said to him, but he managed to shut out everything in order to focus on Will.

"I love you, Mike," Will said. "And I know it may be a lot for you to take in and you may not feel the same way. But damn it, what's the point of keeping it to myself? I just needed you to know, Mike. And whether you're in my life as a friend or something more, just remember that you'll always be the key to my heart, Mike..."

Will was cut off by Mike rushing forward and pressing their lips together. Mike felt so many emotions pouring into this kiss, he was surprised he hadn't started crying. All of his love for Will came pouring out of his soul and he wanted nothing more than to have this moment as a memory for the rest of his life. He held Will gently and Will gently caressed Mike's cheeks as they kissed. Sooner than either of them would have liked, they needed oxygen and so they broke the kiss, both of them blushing profusely.

"So...is that a yes?" Will asked, hoping to break the tension.

"God Will," Mike said leaning in and giving Will a kiss on the forehead. "I can't believe it. You feel the same way I do! Oh my god, Will!"

Mike pulled Will in for a hug and immediately started sobbing. But unlike when he was crying in front of Nancy, Robin or Joyce, these were tears of happiness. Mike had never felt so happy in all of his life. His heart was pounding with joy and relief that his feelings were reciprocated. Will loved him. And he loved Will. But he hadn't said the words yet. Mike broke the hug when he realized this.

"I love you, Will," Mike said, brushing the tears from his eyes. "I love you so much! Will, you being a part of my life is the best thing that's

ever happened to me. I love you!"

Mike leaned forward and started to kiss Will again. He had been dreaming of this for weeks, ever since he realized his feelings. Dreaming about it had been one thing, but actually experiencing it was something completely different. This was everything Mike had ever wanted without realizing it. Mike had no idea it was possible to feel this happy.

When they broke their second kiss, Mike quickly wrapped his arms around Will and pulled him in close. He could swear he could feel the beats of their hearts beating together, as one.

"I love you, Will."

"I love you, Mike."

Notes for the Chapter:

Sorry for such a long wait between chapters! This week I'm on vacation and finally had some time to breathe and get this chapter written; I hope you all love it!

I think there might be one more chapter to this story. I'd like to have Mike and Will have closure with Will's relationship with Johnny, and Johnny will cheer them on. I'm not sure of a timetable on this chapter or even if I will write it, but I'm certainly considering it!

Author's Note:

Me posting stories two days in a row? It's more likely than you think.

This gem was requested on Tumblr where Mike thinks he's homophobic for not liking Will's boyfriend when actually he's just jealous of Will's boyfriend.

Not sure exactly how much of this is to come, but

definitely expect a few chapters, as this one will be a little longer than the other stories. Stay tuned for more soon!